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IF MILLIONS PRAYED

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INTERCHURCH
WORLD MOVEMENT
OF NORTH AMERICA

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NEW YORK

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If Millions Prayed

IN that great New Testament book, the Acts, there is a passage with a thrilling message for today. It presents a powerful combination of truths. It reveals the quality of spirit necessary for a conquering church. It sets forth in gripping phraseology the place of prayer in the creative new epochs of spiritual history.

Many elements always enter into each new development of the religious life of the world, but here special emphasis is given to the place and power of prayer in the expansion of the kingdom of Christ:

“When they had prayed the place was shaken wherein they were gathered together, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

“And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own.” (Acts 4:31, 32.)

Can these experiences of the first century be repeated? The situation faced by the modern church is a call to intercession such as it has never had. What would happen if the

millions in all the churches, with the same vivid and compelling vision of Jesus Christ which these early disciples had, should really give themselves to united prayer? Suppose we had faith enough and our prayer penetrated as far and as deep as theirs into fellowship with Christ, what would be the outcome? What did happen? It is no theory we face but an experience. Scripture records five definite, concrete results. May we not with intensity and reality look for similar results when the church prays?

1. THEY WERE SHAKEN

“**W**HEN they had prayed the place was shaken wherein they were gathered together.” (Acts 4:31.)

Nothing but a vision of God can stir the church as these early disciples were moved. They felt the burden of need; they saw the wounds of Christ; they looked upon the mighty works of God.

The war has shaken the world. It has shaken the church, too, somewhat, but not enough. The church needs new and deeper manifestations of God to enable it to shake off the old age and put on the new. This experience of the early church was evidently no mild emotion, no simple, pleasurable sensation; no gentle thrill, but a cleavage of soul that opened

channels of vitality in their hearts to flood with crimson the life of the world.

That was a dramatic moment in a great irrigation project when a blast was set off which tore a hole through a mountain side and let a river loose to reclaim a million acres from death. Prayer set off the blast that shook that eastern world so profoundly that its life was riven and history changed forever.

After an extended visit to Great Britain some years ago during the Welsh revival and a special study of the spiritual and missionary movements which at that time were sweeping over Great Britain, Dr. S. Earl Taylor expressed the deep conviction of his heart in the following paragraphs now strikingly significant in view of the mighty developments which are upon us:

"It is evident that ordinary methods and ordinary rates of increase in membership and in giving will not suffice. The time has come for the extraordinary, and it is probable that this will come through a special outpouring of the spirit of God in answer to prayer. Is it not true that the great need of the hour is for an ever-increasing volume of intercessory prayer, not only that laborers may be thrust forth into the harvest, but that the church may be profoundly stirred to do its full duty for the causes of world evangelism, and that there may be such an outpouring of the Holy

Spirit as that we may experience in this country such revivals of pure and undefiled religion as have not been seen since apostolic days? It will not suffice to sit down and criticise existing plans and organizations and methods. The great missionary societies of the world have been built up by years of most careful experimentation, and the able leaders of these societies have spent much time in anxious consideration of ways and means for more thoroughly arousing the churches. Has not the time come for sympathetic aggressive and prayerful cooperation on the part of all who believe in and work for the evangelization of the world? If we look at the difficulties which are to be encountered in thoroughly arousing the evangelical churches of the English-speaking world, we may become discouraged; but if we look to the omnipotent God and remember what he has done during the past century in breaking down the barriers and in preparing the way, may we not read with new courage the challenge of the Almighty which is found in the thirty-second chapter of Jeremiah, at verse twenty-seven: 'Behold I am Jehovah, the God of all flesh: is there anything too hard for me?' "

Is this not what we need? Is it not such a new discovery of God, such a new obedience, such expanding plans and such a daring faith that new measures of God's power shall be released? We need to be shaken so that

choked channels may be opened; small channels widened and deepened; new ones riven where none are now; channels big enough for God and big enough for this hour. When they had prayed they were shaken.

Well may we all enter into the spirit of that impassioned prayer:

“Stir me, Oh! stir me, Lord, I care not how,
But stir my heart in passion for the world,
Stir me to give, to go—but most to pray:
Stir, ’till the blood-red banner be unfurled—
O’er lands that still in deepest darkness lie,
O’er deserts where no cross is lifted high.

Stir me, Oh! stir me, Lord. Thy heart was
 stirred
By love’s intensest fire, ’till Thou didst give
Thine only Son, Thy best beloved One,
Even to the dreadful cross, that I might live:
Stir me to give myself so back to Thee,
That Thou canst give Thyself again through
 me.”

2. THEY WERE EMPOWERED

“WHEN they had prayed . . . they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.”

This is the central and indispensable experience of triumphant leadership. Never yet was a man filled with God who did not first pray. Prayer does not empower a man, God alone does that; but prayer opens the way; prayer

cuts through the forest; prayer bridges or breaks down the barriers; prayer quickens the faith; prayer makes God real; prayer clarifies the thinking; prayer energizes the will. Prayer does not change God's will but releases it. Prayer does not create power but transmits it. Prayer does not increase the energies of the universe but it puts on deposit with God energies which he releases to bless the world.

We face a task too big, too complex, too difficult for any but God-empowered men. Unless there is a clear and deep sense that God is here; that the work we do is the will of God; that the power of God is available for this task, how hopeless is our quest! When the millions pray they will be empowered.

We would all accept, I suppose, as a general working basis the following statement: All personal values center in Jesus Christ; all social ideals culminate in the kingdom of God. Yet there are hundreds of millions to whom the church has not carried the personal Christ with conquering power. If these hundreds of millions are to be sought and won there must be veritable avalanches of power in Christ-possessed personalities sent out across Latin, Moslem and pagan lands.

We believe, theoretically at least, in the adequacy of the gospel to meet modern social conditions, yet the three great social sins over

all the world still cry unto God, "The blood of thy brother Abel crieth"—the sin of slaughter. "The sin of Sodom and Gomorrah crieth"—the unrestrained, unconquered passions of men. The cry of the reaper defrauded of his wages and his rights (Jas. 5:4) still comes up before God—the sin of economic injustice. The church must somehow get strength to cope with these forces which are struggling for mastery in our modern world. If on the one hand, "the church," as one expressed it, "is to know what is going on in the tin can back in my alley" and on the other hand, if the church is to win the whole world, we must find that path to power, that lonely road which leads into the hidden resources of God.

Two friends went up into the mountains for their vacation. After they had pitched their tents and made other arrangements for their weeks of rest, one of the friends said to the other: "Let us give some time to prayer before we go to sleep this first night." The prayer that followed carried them over the wide spaces of the world as this man who had learned the secret and power of intercession laid before the Lord the great burden of his heart regarding the work of the kingdom. It was a great hour of penetration and vision. In talking of it afterward the man who had thus been led by his friend into the sacred, secret places of leadership and power said: "When my friend stopped praying I was almost afraid

to reach out my hand in the dark for fear I might touch God."

Is not this the experience which the leaders of our age need? They must reach out their hands and touch God. There is always a sense of awe when one is conscious of that presence which fills all life with glory. But it is not fear of a power that would do us harm, but that refreshing, overwhelming sense of the presence of infinite, omnipotent goodness.

Let it be repeated again and again that if this Movement is carried through to victory, not its leaders only but millions of those who make up the constituency of the church must somehow be brought into such an attitude toward God and into such an atmosphere charged with spiritual vitalities that they can reach out their hands and touch God.

Well may we approach the vision and tasks of these days in the spirit of the Psalmist, as translated by Luther: "My soul in silence waiting all hushed for God."

"When they had prayed . . . they were all filled with the Holy Spirit."

3. THEY DISCOVERED THE SECRET OF COURAGE

"WHEN they had prayed . . . they spake the word of God with boldness."

The church of Christ confronts a task requiring superb courage; it calls for nerve and daring of the highest order. Where shall we find them? When we think of the difficulties within as well as without the church; the indifference of millions; the narrow vision of many, even of those who should be leaders; the problems involved in quickening the church spiritually or in organization and education and finance, we may well throw ourselves upon God.

A British statesman and a French soldier were talking about the comparative merits of British and French soldiers. Said the Frenchman with a fine enthusiasm for his comrades: "The French soldier is the bravest soldier in the world." The British statesman, with no less of fine enthusiasm for his comrades, said: "It may be that the French soldier is the bravest in the world, but the British soldier is brave for a quarter of an hour longer than any soldier on earth."

We are in the midst of a movement in which it is those who know how to be brave for a quarter of an hour longer than any body else who will finally lead to victory.

We must be prepared to face many a battle outnumbered a thousand or ten thousand to one; to march up to machine-gun fire without flinching. We must be patient but firm with those who worship the ancient ways of doing

things; with those who do not hear the gales in the tops of the trees; with those who are progressive in everything else but go slow or let well enough alone in the church; men who forget, as Professor Ross has so strikingly said in *The Changing Chinese*: "Now-a-days world processes are telescoped and history is made at aviation speed."

Do we not have in this experience the explanation of every new spiritual epoch? Prayer is the deepest human secret of initiative and originality in Christian work. Prayer involves the highest creative functions of personality. The pentecostal outpourings which inaugurated new epochs were all preceded and accompanied by prayer; in some cases long periods of waiting upon God.

Here is the human secret of the Wesleyan revival; of the great awakenings in India and Korea and in other parts of the mission field. It characterized the Welsh revival and other great modern spiritual movements. It was the secret of the leadership of William Carey which resulted in the beginning of great missionary movements in Great Britain. It was the same fire that burned in the souls of those Williams College students and at Andover, inaugurating the missionary crusade in America. To learn this lesson afresh we have only to go out to that old butternut tree at Silver Bay under which in 1902 the Young People's Missionary Movement was organ-

ized; or to the chapel of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City where the Laymen's Missionary Movement was launched; or out to Round Top at Northfield, where prayer set on fire a group of college men who began the Student Volunteer Movement.

The modern task of the church requires vast stores of initiative and originality. Where shall they be found except as we press far back into the heart of God where all the visions are born and from which come forth all the creative spiritual energies to redeem the world? The Interchurch World Movement was born of God. It will begin a new spiritual epoch if we are obedient to the call of God. We dare not fail God in this hour.

"When they had prayed . . . they spake the word of God with boldness."

4. THEY WERE UNIFIED

"**W**HEN they had prayed . . . the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul."

How such an experience would unify the forces within any one denomination! How much greater than in any one communion is the need of spiritual fellowship and understanding in the whole church of Christ. Nothing less than a great spiritual task can

unify us. In such a task prayer is always one of the highest unifying factors. It creates favorable conditions for a deep and pervasive spiritual quickening than which there is no means so powerful in blending millions together.

Our hearts are deeply moved as we realize how very greatly unity is needed. Is Christ's prayer in John 17 to be answered? Surely the needs of the world today demand that the united power of the whole church be brought to bear upon them! Have we not recognized the truth as stated by John R. Mott: "An unbelieving world is the price we pay for a divided church?"

Our different communions are too often like a heap of sand. No mechanical pressure can unite the separate grains. Only fire can take a mass of sand and make it into material fit for a cornerstone of the temple of God. Is not one of our supreme needs to have such a burning passion for Christ and world-redemption expressing itself in prayer and work as shall fuse us together in purpose and program and service?

The war threw the nations into a veritable furnace of fire and out of it came cooperation and action under a unified command on a scale never before seen. In our day is not God allowing us to go into a furnace of testing to prove again the reality of our Christianity by challenging us to lay aside

our differences, in obedience to the call of God, and to go forward under a unified command to face our whole common work together? Such a spiritual unity would send a thrill through all Christendom and give hope for still greater triumphs ahead.

“When they had prayed . . . they were of one heart and one soul.”

5. THEY ENTERED INTO THE SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE

“**W**HEN they had prayed . . . not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own.”

The giving of money has been called “the acid test of consecration.” No part of our Christian program is more spiritual than securing the needed money; but only if it is done in the right way. Prayer is the greatest human influence in raising money. The present program of the church has all the elements that make victory possible. It is inclusive of all interests, home and foreign; it calls for deepened spiritual life; it opens up thrilling possibilities of missionary education; it demands organization never so complete and inclusive; it involves a field campaign of great magnitude; it calls for the enlistment and training of laymen on a scale never before possible; it will ultimately be based on a survey which

shall marshal all the facts and call for adequate resources of life and money to meet these needs as a practical expression of our faith in the fact that God wants the whole task undertaken.

We are not afraid of a big budget but we are afraid of a budget which is not big enough. We have no fear of a great organization, but we are afraid of not building an organization powerful enough to carry on the business. We are not afraid of the drive to secure the life and money but we are afraid of that false mysticism which discounts using to the utmost the statesmanship, the brains, sagacity and tested business principles which we profoundly believe God would have us use to realize our program.

“When they had prayed, not one of them said” All this because they saw Jesus Christ and understood the hour—God’s hour—into which they had come.

No such hour as this has ever dawned before for the stewardship of prayer, of life, of talents, of money. Are we equal to the emergency and will we give and pray to the utmost that the church may win a world? This is the opportunity of a thousand life-times. We must do it! We will do it!

